

Give thanks to the living God! (Acts 14:15-17)

Hello Dear Listeners;

Tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day. What will you give thanks for? Perhaps you bought a new vehicle or maybe you had a nice vacation or enjoyed a last weekend of camping. You might be giving thanks for family and friends, for your children, your wife or husband, your parents. You may be grateful for the abundant harvest of your garden or your new house. There are lots of things we can be thankful for. Perhaps you have been cured of a serious illness or a diagnosis at the doctor's turned out not to be as serious as you thought initially. There are lots of things we can be thankful for. But the more important question is: Who do we thank when we celebrate Thanksgiving Day? Who is the one who provides us with all good things? Do we just thank ourselves or do we reach out to and seek the true Giver of all good things, the one who has made all things?

When the apostles Paul and Barnabas were preaching the gospel in what is now modern day Turkey, they were faced with a serious case of people thanking the wrong person. We read in Acts 14 that they had entered the city of Lystra where there was a crippled man who had never walked because he was lame from birth. Paul was preaching the good news to the people of Lystra and this lame man heard it as well. And Paul saw that he had faith to be healed and so he said to him, "Stand up on your feet!" The man listened to Paul, jumped up and began to walk! What a miracle! What a transformation in this man's life. After being crippled all his life, he was able to walk again!

The crowd, which had seen what had happened to the crippled man, shouted out, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" They

called Barnabas Zeus and Paul they called Hermes. The priest of Zeus came and brought bulls because he and the crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to Barnabas and Paul. They were in the process of giving thanks to the wrong people! For Paul and Barnabas did not have the power to heal a crippled man. They were only men, just like everyone in the crowd.

We might think that the people of Lystra were acting very strangely in giving to Paul and Barnabas honour and worship which belonged only to God. And yet also today it happens far too frequently that mere men and women receive adulation and worship which they should not receive. This is especially glaring in the world of so-called celebrities. This has become a modern day cult. So many people are obsessed with knowing what the latest movies stars and Hollywood personalities are doing and how they are living, what their social relationships are and what car they are driving now. These celebrities are expected to fill the void and provide the answers which they cannot provide. Like the Greek gods of old, they all too often set an example of immoral and ungodly living which many follow and emulate in their own lives because they are worshipped as if they were a god.

Paul and Barnabas react very forcefully to the foolishness of the people of Lystra. They exclaim in Acts 14:15, "Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you." They are telling the people, "Do not deceive yourselves and worship us as if we are God." We may think very highly of ourselves and be very proud of all the things that human beings can accomplish. Let us never lose sight of our own frailty and limitations. Man is only a creature and is very weak and vulnerable. We are made from the dust of the earth and to the dust of the earth we will

return. It is God who lives on high in heavenly splendour and majesty. We who live on earth are in the midst of brokenness, a fallen creation, sickness and death. We can think a lot of ourselves but, at the end of the day, we are dependent and fragile. We need our food or we will die. We are dependent upon God's care every day.

Therefore give thanks, praise and worship to the living God! This is what Paul and Barnabas tell the people of Lystra who wanted to worship them. They tell them, "We are bringing you good news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them." They are telling them of the living God, who created everything. For a long time God let them go in their own way but all along he showed himself to them through giving them rain from heaven and crops in their seasons, plenty of food and joy in their hearts. But now God is coming to them through his servants, the apostles, and telling them to believe in the living God and turn to him alone in worship, adoration and thanksgiving.

There is a certain irony in this story. The people of Lystra wanted to offer sacrifices to Paul and Barnabas because they thought they were gods come down to earth in human form. They wanted to offer sacrifices so that they could bargain for and assure themselves of the favour of the gods who had now come to visit them.

Yet how different the reality is! God himself did come down to this world in human likeness. God the Son became man in a complete and total way. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is true God and true man completely. He came as man in order that he might offer himself as the sacrifice of atonement. He did not come in order that we might bargain for his favour and give him gifts so that he might decide to help us. No,

he came of his own sovereign will and he came in order that he might give himself up in love for us. We did not deserve his love but he came anyways, wanting to save a people for himself. He came as a result of a love that we will never be able to fathom or understand. He came to save sinners like you and me. He came to save us from our enslavements to worthless things, idols and false gods. He came in order that we would be set free from bondage to our sins, to our idols of money and status, of silly amusements and treacherous allurements and whatever else threatens to dominate our life in this world. He came so that we might have true life with God the Father, be reconciled to him and find our true peace and rest in him alone.

The apostle Paul told the people at Lystra that it is the true God alone who “fills your hearts with joy.” True joy and happiness is something which God alone can provide. For he never disappoints and he has made us in order to enjoy him forever, to serve him and to find our satisfaction in him alone. He alone is the living God, who is holy, righteous, good, just, compassionate and merciful. He has made all things and he has made us to be his children, who find their life’s purpose in glorifying him, the great and awesome God.

What great riches and blessings we have received from the Lord in his Son Jesus Christ! Turn to him alone! May your whole life be a life of thankfulness and praise to him for his many treasures, especially for the gift of himself that you might have a relationship with him, fellowship and communion unending. Go your way rejoicing! May your hearts be filled with joy and thankfulness because of who God is and what he has done for us in his Son Jesus Christ. May you experience the peace and joy that he alone can provide.

As human beings we are weak and dependent, frail and feeble but we do not need to worry about the future because we know that the Lord will provide us with all good things in his time. He has shown his faithfulness also in the past year and will provide us with what we need according to his plan for our lives. Rejoice in God alone and serve him with gladness all your days.

Amen, and thanks so much for listening!